

The Elevating Power of Literature.

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The Elevating Power of Literature.

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The Elevating Power of Literature.

Literature is the expression of ideals. It is the crystallization of thought. It is the character of a nation written in its books; its emotions throbbing in its drama, songs and ballads.

In its true sense, Literature deals with the emotions of the human soul. Its true study is not a study of words, of grammatical constructions or of rhetorical figures. It is nothing less than a study of life, itself, of whatever is best and highest in life expressed in the best and highest way.

Every work of art, be it a cathedral, a statue, a

painting or a poem, is the expression of some idea in the mind of the artist, the worth of which is determined by its manifestations of truth and beauty. It must appeal not only to the reason, but also to that faculty which is the climax of intellect - the imagination. Thru this faculty, all art has its origin. It is that element in man which enables him to see things with his mind, that he has never seen with his eyes, to hear things with his mind that he has never heard with his ears, to live in distant lands as well as at home, to live in the past as well as the present. It is the force by which other powers are lifted, and so unified as to act together. When man is raised by the

power of this higher reason and into it are marshalled all the facts that have been recognized by the intellect, all the experiences that have been felt by the human heart, there in that high realm, all these are united - transcendent he is. The possibilities of the human mind, cannot be measured until the imagination is inspired, until it has been trained, until it shows that the human soul has no limit. I think of the hard conditions of the lonely New England life, devoid of all beauty and pleasure; of its unendurableness had it not been touched by the ideal created by the poet, and yet we omit an important element in the lives of the Pilgrims if we overlook the means they had of

living above their barren circumstances - they had their Bible, which opened to them a boundless realm of poetry and imagination; it was to them the unequalled record of thought and emotion; the reservoir of poetry, traditions, stories, parables, exhortations, consolations and great imaginative adventure, for which the spirit of man is always longing. It supplied to them, as no other book did, that want in human life which is higher than the wants of mere ordinary facts or common place knowledge.

Poetry is the united harmony of imagination and beauty. Strictly and artistically and not considered merely as poetic feeling, which is more or less shared by

all the world, but - as the operation of that feeling, is the utterance of a passion for truth, beauty and power. It stands between nature and convention, keeping alive among us the enjoyment of the external and spiritual world. Its means are whatever the universe contains. It has constituted the most enduring fame of nations.

"Poetry", says Shelley, "lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects to be as if not familiar".

The great secret of morals is love, an identification of ourselves with the beautiful existing in thought, action or person, not our own. A man to be greatly good must imagine intensely and

comprehensively; he must put himself in another's place. The great instrument of moral good is imagination, to which poetry administers.

How rich in this art was classical antiquity! Greece in her eight centuries of literary productiveness, gave the world its greatest epic poet, Homer, the finest of lyric poets, Pindar and Sappho, the prince of orators, Demosthenes; aside from our own Bacon and Spenser, the greatest philosophers of all ages, Plato and Aristotle, the greatest writer of pure tragedy Aeschylus, who in sublimity has never been surpassed. For nearly twenty two hundred years, these immortal creations have been the delight and inspiration

of men of genius and are as marvellous to us to-day, as they were to the Athenians. They reveal to us the conserved sentiments of a splendid age. Who can estimate the value of the works that have been handed down to us. Labelled with the names of Aeschylus, Pindar, Sappho and Homer? Have they not been the teachers of all subsequent ages?

Though Rome taught the world, the arts of war and law, its literature as a whole is on a lower plane than that of Greece. She has however produced some of the world's greatest lights, — Cicero, whose genius and influence was directed to

what was most precious in civilization. His writings appeal to what is noblest in the soul - love of country, of home, of nature and felt in every one inspiring the highest sentiments that exalt human life. He gave higher beauty to the Latin language. He added to its richness, copiousness and strength. He gave it music.

If the Romans did not produce a Homer, they can boast a Virgil, whose Aeneid takes its place among imperishable works.

Lucretius has not yet been fully appreciated but for depth of meditation and as a painter and worshiper of nature, he stands superior to all poets of antiquity.

where there would have been the literature of the early church, of the reformation or of modern nations, had not the original writers of early Athens and Rome been our schoolmasters.

These nations fell - prey to the barbarism around about them. Their ideals slept - for a thousand years buried beneath the ignorance of their surroundings. Popular insurrections arise inspired not by ideas of liberty but by a sense of oppression and degradation.

The 14th century was marked by protests and warfare. The first great genius to arouse Europe from its torpor was Dante, the Shakespeare of Latin races.

Poetry then, which of all literature is the most stimulating, broadening and beautifying was the first influence which elevated the human mind amid the miseries of a gloomy period. Dante by his immortal comedy gave the first great impulse to Italian thought.

Nation after nation kindled with the ardor of the new spirit. England drew from Italy, knowledge and inspiration. "O very breeze", says Lowell, "was dusted with the golden pollen of Greece and Rome". In the midst of these agitations, public miseries, and reviving haste for literature and art, Chaucer arose. He is the union of what been

separate elements, the end of the old and beginning of the new. His "Canterbury Tales", are interesting and instructive to the student of language and literature.

They paint the age more vividly than any known history. The men and women there represented stand out to us in fresh and living colours. They are alive to the same sentiments that move us. They enjoyed friends as we do. What people can live without friendship, sympathy and love? Are not these the sentiments of the soul? Do not the Hebrew Psalms written twenty five hundred years ago exhibit the same emotions in the minds of people to-day

as they did among the Jews?
Is it not because they ap-
peal to the common human-
ity - the same today as it
was in the beginning and
will be to the end?

Shakespeare, the summit
of our literature, or the
literature of the world
is studied, admired and
loved because of his fi-
delity to nature. He brings
us life in the greatest
force, volume and beauty.
His unique, pithy, every-
day sentiments, like the
Proverbs of Solomon will
be recognized by all nations
and ages, because they
touch the common soul
that binds humanity.
Milton, too, ranks
high in English thought.
But it is impossible to
particularize further. We

have reached the period
 in the history of our
 literature, that is so
 prolific of great writers
 in all the vastly multiplied
 departments of thought,
 that it is impossible to
 mention them all. However
 the year 1809, was a proud
 year for England and
 America. It saw the
 birth of Abraham Lincoln,
 the greatest of Emancipa-
 tors, of Charles Darwin,
 the greatest scientist, since
 Isaac Newton, the essence
 of whose book has be-
 come a part of modern
 thought that floats in
 the air we breathe. Of
 William Gladstone the
 greatest statesman of the
 Victorian Era, who stands
 forth like some sun-
 crowned mountain peak,

supremely great - in many
 sides of his character and
 career. This year also
 saw the birth of Tenny-
 son, who though among
 the poets of this age ranked
 with the greatest of any
 age. His "In Memoriam"
 is the finest monument
 erected to the memory
 of man. He was a lover
 of human progress, doubt-
 less his greatest service to
 its cause was rendered
 in the "Idylls of the King".
 The simple qualities which
 he there glorifies are the
 foundation of human life -
 reverence, loyalty, obed-
 ience were the watch-
 words around which
 the Idylls grew. They
 found their inspiration
 as do we in the love of
 mankind, of family and

native land.

Surely then it is true that Literature is a world-wide and expressive and interpretative of the spirit of humanity. No man can make full acquaintance with that spirit who fails to make companionship, with its greatest masters and interpreters.

This close intimacy affords a personal enrichment which is the finest and highest result of personality. The greatest service rendered by the world's literary artists, - the greatest service that can be rendered is the enlargement, enrichment, and unfolding of ourselves. They nourish and develop that mysterious personality which

lies behind all feeling, thought and action; that central force within which feeds the specific activities through which we give ourselves to the world. It leads us to recognizing the visible world as a symbol of the invisible, a changing vesture, veiling the unchanging goodness and loveliness of power. No grander field does this world offer than the world of thought and the field of ideas pictured in language.